National Summit on Local News Preservation

Proceedings, Findings, and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

Local news in the United States is disappearing, and so is its digital record. The country has lost nearly 3,500 newspapers and more than 270,000 newspaper jobs, leaving over 200 counties with no local news source at all and another 1,524 with only one. Even when newsrooms survive, deleted webpages and broken links erode the record of history's first draft.

On June 17, 2026, Internet Archive convened the National Summit on Local News Preservation in National Harbor, Maryland, with the Poynter Institute and Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), with support from Press Forward and the Society of American Archivists Foundation. Nearly 50 organizations were represented, bringing news organizations and memory institutions into the same room, many meeting their counterparts for the first time.

Five recurring themes emerged across panels and breakout sessions: capacity and precarious knowledge; the absence of born-digital standards; the tension between rights and revenue; discovery, AI, and the changing web; and ownership, consolidation, and priorities. From these, attendees developed recommendations for memory institutions and for news organizations, ranging from immediate next steps like creating shared resource guides to strategic recommendations like creating national standards and funding models.

Three priorities emerged as high-priority next steps: reconvening stakeholders regularly, producing the concrete deliverables identified by the conference, and building the public case for treating local news as civic memory rather than corporate property. The work now is to connect and scale existing efforts before more of the record is lost.

Background: A Crisis of Disappearing Local News

Local news in the United States is disappearing. In some cases, this disappearance is the result of newsrooms closing or shrinking. According to the 2025 Medill State of Local News report, the country has lost nearly 3,500 newspapers over the past two decades, along with more than 270,000 newspaper jobs. Over 200 U.S. counties have no local news source, and another 1,524 have only one. This leaves roughly 50 million Americans with limited or no access to reliable local news. Small, independently owned outlets have suffered the steepest losses in recent years. Newsroom closures in 2025 included a 141-year-old newspaper in Porter County, Indiana; closures in Mississippi and New Hampshire created "news deserts" in their communities.[1] Even when newsrooms avoid closure and continue to publish, their online content is in danger of vanishing. A 2024 Pew Research Center study found that a quarter of all webpages that existed between 2013 and 2023 are no longer accessible and that 23% of news webpages contain at least one broken link.[2]

> *The historical record of local communities across the country is vanishing in real time.*

Archivists and librarians understand that access to local news is critical to their users. Local news documents the history of a particular place and its citizens, contains valuable information that may not be available elsewhere, and can support a wide range of research, learning, and knowledge. Likewise, journalists and editors understand the ongoing value of the content they produce. Often, local journalists are the only ones documenting the events and stories emerging from a community. Yet mounting economic pressures and technical challenges have kept local news from being preserved and remaining accessible into the future.

The National Summit on Local News Preservation, part of Internet Archive's Today's News for Tomorrow (TNT) program, was designed to bring these groups together to develop an actionable, scalable plan to address this crisis.

Today's News for Tomorrow

Today's News for Tomorrow is a joint project of Internet Archive, the Poynter Institute, and IRE, to help local newsrooms preserve their own reporting. TNT is funded by Press Forward, a national initiative to reimagine local news. The Summit itself received additional support from the Society of American Archivists Foundation. The goals of the TNT program include:

1. **Engaging newsrooms directly.** Over two years, the program will work with up to 300 newsrooms nationwide, organized into six cohorts. Each newsroom receives web archiving and digital preservation services from Internet Archive at no cost as well as training on how to embed preservation into existing workflows.
2. **Opening access.** TNT will release a central online access portal bringing archived local news from participating newsrooms into one place, and will invite university archives, public libraries, and journalism schools to contribute as it grows. This will be a major resource for journalists, scholars, and students.
3. **Building partnerships.** The initiative will create the conditions for collaboration between newsrooms and cultural heritage organizations at both national scale (shared infrastructure and support) and the hyperlocal level (a single newsroom paired with a single local library).

Precedent: The Dodging the Memory Hole Convenings

The National Summit on Local News Preservation was not the first attempt to bring newsrooms and memory institutions into the same room around this problem. From 2014 to 2017, the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) at the University of Missouri convened a series of national forums called "Dodging the Memory Hole." The name comes from George Orwell's *1984*, in which records that conflicted with the official narrative were dropped down a "memory hole" and destroyed. The "memory hole" discussed in the convenings was largely the unintentional result of technological systems never designed to keep information for the long term.[3]

Across those years, the events brought together librarians, archivists, newsroom leaders, technologists, and academics to discuss preserving born-digital news (news content originating in digital form). The 2014 forum closed by defining three action areas: awareness, standards and practices, and legal frameworks. Participants also

identified persistent obstacles including unclear preservation language, copyright status, technical complexity of online news, and the lack of relationships between content creators and stewardship organizations.[4] A decade later, those same obstacles persist. The Summit can be understood, in part, as a resumption of the conversation started with the 2014 Memory Hole convening.

Overview of the Summit

The National Summit on Local News Preservation was held on June 17, 2026, in National Harbor, Maryland, in conjunction with the 2026 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) conference. Internet Archive and its partners, the Poynter Institute and IRE, convened the summit with support from Press Forward and the Society of American Archivists Foundation.

The event was free and deliberately structured to bring the producers, preservers, and users of local news into the same room. The goals of the Summit were: to surface proven preservation strategies and partnerships; to build relationships among leaders across the news and cultural heritage sectors; and to develop and disseminate recommendations for addressing the local news preservation crisis.

Anna Trammell of Internet Archive and Kristen Hare of the Poynter Institute opened the day by introducing the TNT program and establishing the goals for the Summit. These opening remarks laid out both the long-running crisis and newer threats, citing the alarming rate of newsroom closures, the increase of news deserts, and the number of news publishers choosing to block the preservation of their websites. The day's central purpose, Trammell and Hare stated, was not to dwell on problems, but to open a working dialogue between two sectors and begin drafting actionable, scalable recommendations before more local news is lost.

The first panel, "The Future of the First Draft: The Current State and Future of Local News Preservation," was moderated by Margot Williams of The Intercept, a former news librarian with four decades of investigative journalism experience. The panel convened journalists, academics, archivists, and librarians to discuss the value of local news and the state of its preservation. Molly Hardy of Harvard's Library Innovation Lab, who previously managed the National Digital Newspaper Program at

the National Endowment for the Humanities, spoke to the enduring value of local news and to the successes and shortcomings of existing national aggregation programs. Eli Neiburger, director of the Ann Arbor District Library, described the library's various initiatives to support both the preservation and production of local news. His examples illustrated what successful newsroom-library collaboration looks like in practice. Chris Contakes, chief technology officer at the Chronicle of Higher Education, addressed the opportunities and challenges posed by emerging technologies. Edward McCain, former Digital Curator at the Reynolds Journalism Institute and lead organizer of the "Dodging the Memory Hole" convenings, connected the discussion to more than a decade of research on digital news preservation.

The second panel, "The 13 Millisecond Memory: Images and Moving Images in Local News Preservation," was moderated by Randa Cardwell of the Photojournalism Archive Project. This panel took its name from research showing that humans can process an image in as little as 13 milliseconds.[5] Citing this study, Cardwell reminded attendees that images are a vital source of information and yet they are often left out of discussions around local news preservation due to complex legal and technical challenges. Panelists Stephanie Jenkins (Archival Producers Alliance) and Becca Bender (Rhode Island News Media Archive) outlined the corporatization that has cut off access to local TV news and the practice among many newsrooms of deleting born-digital content on short cycles, often at the direction of legal counsel. Cassidy Meurer (University of Louisville) discussed her ongoing work to preserve and provide access to the Courier Journal's photo morgue containing over 10 million images. Frank LoMonte (Senior Legal Counsel for CNN and a professor at University of Georgia School of Law) examined how the challenges of preserving still versus moving images diverge, and the legal questions each raises.

Five practitioners then gave lightning talks describing local news preservation work already underway. Dee Bowers of the Center for Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library discussed how Internet Archive's Community Webs[6] program has been leveraged to support the preservation and access of online news in Brooklyn. Meghan O'Rourke of the CCTV Center for Media and Democracy in Burlington, Vermont, shared examples illustrating the value of local access news and work to establish a digital archive. Shawn Schollmeyer described how the State Library of Washington is furthering their legally mandated efforts to preserve and provide access to

newspapers across the state. Stephen Jefferson of Bloom Labs shared how spatial data is being incorporated in efforts to preserve and expand local news. Finally, Justine Tobiasz of Chicago Public Media shared examples from a newsroom stewarding the archives of two long-standing Chicago media outlets, the Chicago Sun-Times and WBEZ. Together, the talks took the ideas and theories discussed in earlier panels and grounded them in concrete, functioning models.

The afternoon was devoted to facilitated breakout discussions, followed by a report-out in which a speaker from each group presented findings and the conveners synthesized recommendations. These discussions were designed to give attendees the opportunity to further explore the ideas and examples first brought up in earlier panels and talks.

Who Was in the Room

Attendees represented a broad cross-section of the fields that touch local news preservation, spanning nearly 50 institutions across memory and cultural heritage, journalism, and others.

Memory and cultural heritage institutions made up the largest contingent:

- **National cultural heritage institutions:** American Archive of Public Broadcasting, the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History
- **Academic libraries and archives:** Columbia College Chicago, George Mason, Harvard, Stanford, Temple, and Trinity Washington, the Universities of Baltimore, Georgia, Illinois, Louisville, Maryland, North Carolina, North Texas, and Oregon, and Howard University's Black Press Archives
- **Public libraries and historical societies:** the Alexandria, Ann Arbor District, Brooklyn, Grand Rapids, Queens, and Waltham public libraries, Springfield's Lincoln Library, and the Minnesota Historical Society
- **Specialized moving-image and broadcast archives:** the CCTV Center for Media and Democracy, GBH Archives, the Rhode Island News Media Archive, and the Vanderbilt Television News Archive

Journalism organizations spanned newsrooms, the schools that train reporters, and the organizations that support them:

- **Journalism schools:** Columbia Journalism School, the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri, and the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism
- **National newsrooms:** the Chicago Tribune and The Intercept, alongside small and nonprofit local outlets including the Bow Valley Insider, Red de Periodistas de la Amazonía Venezolana, Street Sense Media, and The Well News
- **Journalism support organizations:** the Freedom of the Press Foundation, IRE, the MDDC Press Association, and Poynter

Rounding out the room were preservation-service vendors (George Blood LP and Portico/ITHAKA) and representatives of end users (the Archival Producers Alliance and Bloom Labs).

This mix of journalists, librarians, archivists, technologists, and researchers made the breakout conversations productive. Many participants met their counterparts from the "other" sector for the first time.

Breakout Session Analysis

The breakout groups were organized into five tracks—access and discovery; infrastructure and technology; organizational culture and partnerships; rights, revenue, and the public good; and sustainability and advocacy—following a common template: identify obstacles, map the assets each sector brings, and devise immediate and strategic recommendations. The same challenges and opportunities emerged repeatedly across breakout groups. The synthesis below reports on those cross-cutting themes:

Capacity and precarious knowledge. The single most pervasive obstacle was limited staff resources. Group after group described being "the only one doing this," chronic backlogs, and burnout as resources shrink while the work grows. Newsroom librarian

positions have largely disappeared, along with the deep institutional knowledge professionals in those roles held. The sustainability group noted that recent federal cuts eliminated positions that had never been built into organizations' core budgets.

The absence of born-digital standards. Existing legal and preservation frameworks remain print-oriented. Participants discussed how to handle online content drift (which version of a continually edited article do you save?), dynamic and multi-channel output, reader comments, and formats that no longer render. Several groups cited the need for modern standards for digital news that serve memory institutions and researchers alike and for a unified discovery platform comparable to what Chronicling America[7] provides for historical newspapers.

The rights and revenue tension. This was the deepest structural divide of the day. Most newsrooms are businesses that need to monetize their content; memory institutions work to make material open and accessible. A persistent theme in the rights breakout groups was the need to dispel the myth that limiting access to archival material protects its value. In practice, discoverability can drive licensing revenue: posting archival descriptions or access copies online is often how professional producers find content they then pay to use. Groups also flagged deeds-of-gift that secure preservation but not access as a widespread, correctable problem. Attendees cited a need for better training in Library Science and Archival Studies programs around rights negotiation.

Discovery, AI, and the changing web. Groups noted that archives can no longer rely on search engines, as AI-driven summaries and ranking may deprioritize memory institutions. At the same time, there is an escalating "arms race" against AI scrapers and bot traffic, where blocking is a blunt instrument that also shuts out legitimate users. Metadata gaps, paywalls, and professional siloing compound the discovery problem.

Ownership, consolidation, and priorities. Corporate ownership and conglomeration put layers of distance between memory institutions and key decision makers (frequently lawyers, publishers, and corporate managers, not journalists). Local contacts change often, and there is little financial motive to focus on preservation. As Kristen Hare of Poynter put it in one group, asking a journalist on deadline to think about

preservation is like telling someone their kitchen is on fire while also noting that there is black mold in the attic. Both are real problems, but the fire commands all the attention while the mold remains out of sight, out of mind, until it is too late.

The event's asset-mapping exercise produced clear agreement about what each sector brings. Newsrooms contribute community relationships and trust, deep local and subject knowledge, storytelling ability, a platform for advocacy, credentialed access to record events, and, increasingly, existing licensing infrastructure. Memory institutions contribute cataloging and metadata expertise, public trust and non-partisan standing, information literacy and research skills, long-range systems thinking, physical space (which newsrooms increasingly lack), vetted relationships with digitization vendors, and, in some cases, mission-subsidized sustainability.

Repeatedly, participants described the need for a "translator" between two professions that use different languages and work on different timetables.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged across the breakout groups and are organized by timeframe and audience.

Recommendations for Newsrooms

IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt a "just save it" mindset: preserve what you can now, even without best-practice standards in place.
- Reach out to state libraries, state archives, universities, and public libraries to find partners already doing this work in your community.
- Designate a point person responsible for establishing preservation workflows and maintaining relationships with memory institutions.
- Build internal training for journalists on how to use archives, including mining existing newsroom archives for present-day stories and potential revenue opportunities.[8]

- Begin changing born-digital workflows now: standardized, meaningful file names and basic metadata at the point of creation, on the principle that the last step of the creator's process is the first step of the archivist's.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop national standards for born-digital news content and moving images.
- Build archiving into the newsroom business plan from the outset, positioned as a future licensing revenue stream and information source for journalists rather than a cost.
- Drive cultural change through the TNT program, following the model by which Poynter's crime-reporting trainings eventually reshaped AP Stylebook practice.[9]

Recommendations for Memory Institutions

IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in lightweight marketing and outreach (social media, storytelling about collections, and a presence at journalism conferences) to make resources visible to newsrooms.
- Attack the backlog of local news collections with enhanced accession records, minimal-processing approaches, and volunteer programs.
- Shift toward licensing agreements that return reciprocal value to creators.
- Develop shared resources such as guides for navigating conversations between publishers, legal departments, and memory institutions; case studies; and example agreements.
- Build a clearinghouse to connect newsrooms and memory institutions, especially for collections in imminent peril.
- Create an archives "estate planning" toolkit for publishers to plan before closure.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Launch a Report for America-style fellowship that embeds archivists in newsrooms for two-year terms to build preservation plans and connect newsrooms with local memory institutions.

- Establish a national network or umbrella organization, and an academic home that produces data rather than anecdotes, to unlock funding.
- Create a National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP)-style federal program for local television and radio.
- Pursue legislation to modernize legal-deposit requirements beyond print.
- Explore opportunities for diversifying sustained public funding, including ideas like a small streaming levy funding a preservation trust.
- Reform deed-of-gift and revenue-sharing practices.
- Fund the direct purchase of at-risk work from individual photojournalists to ensure money reaches creators.
- Bring librarians back into newsrooms and expand curricula for the 21st-century digital news librarian.

Next Steps

The recommendations above span a wide variety of actors and timelines. Three priorities, surfaced repeatedly across breakout groups, offer the clearest path from this Summit to sustained progress.

- **Reconvene stakeholders on a regular cadence.** The decade-long gap between the "Dodging the Memory Hole" convenings and the Summit was widely seen as a missed opportunity for sustaining momentum. Regional meetups, virtual gatherings, and shared online spaces were mentioned as potential formats for continued gatherings.
- **Produce the concrete deliverables the breakouts converged on.** Resource guides, case studies, a clearinghouse, and an estate planning toolkit are all achievable in the near term and would give both sectors something tangible to use.
- **Build the evidence base and the public case.** An academic home for data to support funding requests is needed, and a simple "just save it" public campaign from a trusted messenger could draw the attention of the public and of potential funders to

this topic. All groups described a need for reframing the issue: treating local news not as a company's property to be monetized or hidden but as public data and civic memory that belongs to local communities.

Conclusion

Local news is civic memory. It is the running record of what a community was, did, and decided, and contains information that may not be available anywhere else. Treating it as such reframes preservation from a cost to an obligation. A single convening is not enough. Many of the recommendations in this report are achievable now, but only if both sectors treat this Summit as the start of a commitment rather than a one-time event. The stakeholders, the models, and the ideas already exist. What remains is to move the work forward together before more of the record is lost.

Endnotes

1 Medill Local News Initiative, *The State of Local News 2025* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2025), https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/projects/state-of-local-news/2025/.

2 Pew Research Center, "When Online Content Disappears," May 17, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/data-labs/2024/05/17/when-online-content-disappears/.

3 "Dodging the Memory Hole: Saving Born-Digital News Content," Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute, Journalism Digital News Archive, November 10–11, 2014, https://rjionline.org/jdna/jdna-events/dodging-the-memory-hole-saving-born-digital-news-content/.

4 Potter, Abby, "Dodging the Memory Hold: Collaborations to Save the News," Library of Congress Blogs, December 19, 2014, https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2014/12/dodging-the-memory-hole-collaborations-to-save-the-news/.

5 Anne Trafton, "In the Blink of an Eye," MIT News, January 16, 2014, https://news.mit.edu/2014/in-the-blink-of-an-eye-0116.

6 Established in 2017, Internet Archive's Community Webs program provides public libraries, community archives, and similar organizations with tools and training to support their work to document local history.

7 Chronicling America, a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress, provides access to newspapers published before 1963 and digitized through the National Digital Newspaper Program.

8 The Summit served as inspiration for a webinar held in August 2026 for IRE members in partnership with the GBH Archives focused on archiving methods and resources for everyday reporting and investigative journalism. IRE also offers other relevant trainings for journalists on topics like "Making news archives more useful with LLMs," "Traditional research skills in the AI era," and "Digging through the archives."

9 McBride, Kelly, "AP Stylebook's new chapter on crime is a glimpse into the future," Poynter Institute, June 4, 2024, https://www.poynter.org/commentary/2024/ap-stylebook-new-criminal-justice-entry/.